

BEYOND AGENCY

Voice and Space in Africa's Development



Editor

Maurice Nyamanga Amutabi

CENTRE FOR DEMOCRACY, RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (CEDRED), NAIROBI, KENYA

Beyond Agency, Voice and Space in Africa's Development

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Effect of friendship status on primary school pupils' attitude towards schooling and academic achievement in Oyo State, Nigeria

By Amosun Moses Dele

Abstract

The importance of both attractive school and classroom contexts as social environment and optimum conditions for effective learning is acknowledged by all educators. The reason is that classroom interaction plays vital roles in the social and academic development of primary school pupils through formation of friends which is common among them. However, literature has shown that lack of positive peer interaction among primary school pupils is prevalent in Nigeria primary schools and this problem has been hindering positive peer relationship like friendship which is capable of enhancing social, attitudinal, emotional and academic development of the pupils. In fact, it has been observed that for pupils who are not acknowledged by their peers for being friendly, sociable, kind, competent, willing to help and supportive as they do to popular and friendly pupils, school can be a very unpleasant place because friendship continues to impact pupils' attitude towards schooling and academic achievement throughout childhood. Thus, a single friendship in the classroom can be sufficient to contribute to the pupils' overall well-being in school as well as future, lifelong development of the pupils and the society. This study therefore investigated the effect of friendship status on primary school pupils' attitude towards schooling and academic achievement. The study design is survey research of the ex-post facto type. Five hundred and eighty seven (587) public primary school pupils randomly sampled from fourteen primary schools participated in the study. One research question was raised and answered. Four instruments were developed and validated to gather the data. Data collected were analyzed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). The results showed significant difference in the attitude of pupils towards schooling. The researcher concluded that friendship status is an essential determinant of pupils' attitude towards schooling and recommendations were made that could promote pupils' attitude towards schooling and academic achievement and by extension societal development.

Key words: Classroom interaction, Friendship, Attitude, Schooling, Child development

Introduction

Pupils' effective learning depends on many numbers of factors ranging from home to school factors, parent's and teacher's factors as well as pupils' characteristics. However, one factor that has rarely being investigated is classroom interaction or sociometric variables among primary school pupils (Haw, 2017) and Salami, 2005). One of such variables is friendship which deals with mutual dyadic relationship which is thought to be important in middle childhood because it fosters pupils' self-esteem and sensitivity to others or subjective feelings about the adequacy of their peer relationship.

Friendship during primary school age or middle childhood years is a common phenomenon and is associated with children development in general. Poulin and Chan, (2010) Tomada, Schneider, Domini, Greeman and Fonzi (2005) observed that having friends contributed overall to successful emotional social and cognitive development of children after the transition especially in terms of pupil's positive attitude towards schooling.

Moreover, Ryan, Stiller and Lynch (1994) opined that supportive interpersonal relationship such as friendship ease the stress that accompanies changes during the primary school years and after the transition to high school. This is consistent with Bowlby's

attachment theory. Bowlby (1988) theorized that human beings of all ages are happiest when they experience trusted others as standing behind them. Barret and Invelt, (1991) has also demonstrated that pupils master basic cognitive and academic skills better when they work with others and that development of positive attitude towards schooling is one of the many positive outcomes of secure close friendship.

Friendship is defined as a reciprocal commitment between two individuals who consider themselves as equal (Hartup, 1992). It is a bilateral construct referring to a pupil's participation in a close, mutual dyadic relationship with overlapping yet unique influences on development and attitude of pupils towards schooling and academic achievement (Martin, 2009). Usually, children of school age have four or five friends most often of the same sex with whom they tend to spend most of their time (Wentzel, 2003). Friends always choose to be with each other and value interacting with each other. As the relationship between friends is reciprocal they cooperate more extensively than non-friends, especially when they are engaged in tasks that involve turn taking and mutually regulated effort like dramatic play. These sorts of interactions are especially important for development of attitude towards schooling and academic achievement.

Friendship in school especially best friendship can lead to a psychological sense of school membership (Newgent, Lee and Daniel, 2007). Pupils who feel like a real part of the school, who have other pupils take their opinions seriously who are treated with as much respect as other pupils, and who are included in lots of activities at school tend to have a greater sense of school membership. This sense of membership, including having a best friend can have impact on pupils' sense of belongingness and in turn, can have impact on academic achievement (Zabel, 2008). Thus, given the importance of sense of belonging, having a best friend at school can be beneficial socially, emotionally and academically.

Research has revealed that pupils who have friends display greater competence than those who do not have friends and pupils who are friendless are less adjusted, lower in social competence and higher in negative behaviour than those with friends (French, Jansen, Riansavi and Setiono, 2003). Also there is evidence that positive friendship qualities are associated with pupils' school involvement and academic achievement (Burk and Lauren, 2005). Reports from Brendgen, Little and Krappmann, (2000), on pre-adolescent suggest that shared views of friendship are linked to social adjustment which gives rise to prediction that discrepant perceptions of negativity and positivity may be associated with behaviour problems and difficulties with attending school.

Tomada, Schneider, Domini, Greenman and Fonsi (2005) examined friendship as a predictor of attitude towards schooling following a transition to formal academic instruction and evaluation in a longitudinal study. The participants were pupils of seventeen classes in eleven schools. They found that self-reported liking of school decreased sharply after the transition. However, there were some indications that having friends contributed overall to positive attitude towards schooling after the transition especially in terms of liking of schools.

Besides, the findings also revealed that both pupils liking of school and their friends' antisocial behaviour were predicted by their friends' attitudes toward schooling and their friends' antisocial behaviour. The implication of the above premise therefore is that attitude towards schooling is an important determinant of several aspects of pupils' scholastic and social success in middle childhood because motivation for school tasks is encouraged by intimate interpersonal relationships.

In Nigeria primary schools, peer interaction such as friendship and attitude towards schooling had been found to be related (Falaye and Gesinde, 2003; Falayajo, Makoju, Okebukola, Onugha and Olubodun, 1997; Babarinde, 1986). For example, Falaye and Gesinde (2003) reported that lack of interest in school and discouragement by mates contributed to non-school attendance behaviour and achievement of the eighty-two sampled

chronic absentee primary school pupils in Ondo State Nigeria. Falayajo et al (1997) also established peer interaction problem as one of the reasons given by primary four pupils for absence from school. They revealed pupils who did not like school mentioned problem of fighting among pupils as one of the reasons for disliking school.

From the above, it could be implied that lack of positive peer interaction among primary school pupils is prevalent in Nigeria primary schools and this problem has been hindering positive peer relationship like friendship which is capable of enhancing social, attitudinal, emotional and academic development of the pupils. In fact, Cowie, Smith, Boulton and Laver (1994) maintained that for pupils who are not acknowledged by their peers for being friendly, sociable, kind, competent, willing to help and supportive as they do to popular and friendly pupils, school can be a very unpleasant place because friendship continues to impact pupils' attitude towards schooling and academic achievement throughout childhood and that a single friendship in the classroom can be sufficient to contribute to the pupils' overall well-being in school (Coleman, 1966). This study therefore investigated the effects of friendship status on primary schools pupils' attitude towards schooling and academic achievement.

Statement of the Problem

Social interaction among primary school pupils setting is fundamental to their attitude towards schooling and their academic achievement. The reason is that pupils' attitude towards schooling and academic achievement depend on the level of interaction among primary school pupils. Literature has also shown that friendship status is a factor in classroom environment that could either enhance or hinder pupils' attitude towards schooling and academic achievement. The present study therefore examined the effect of friendship status on primary school pupils' attitude towards schooling and academic achievement.

Research Question

The following research question was raised and answered in the study.

1. Is there significant difference among pupils with no friend, one friend and more than one friend in their:
 - (a) attitude towards schooling?
 - (b) academic achievement?

Methodology

This study is an ex-post facto survey which investigated effects of pupils' friendship on attitude towards schooling and academic achievement. The population for this study comprised all pupils in the public primary schools within Ibadan city. The sample consisted of five hundred and eighty seven pupils (587) randomly sampled for the study. Four validated instruments were used to gather the data. They are: Peer Assessment of Social Behaviour Scale (PASBS); Sociometric Nomination Instrument (SNI), Pupils Attitude toward Schooling (PATS) and Academic Achievement Record Tool (PAART). A significant level of 0.05 was set to answer the research question raised in the study. The investigator administered the instruments on the participants and the data was analysed using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) which resulted in the following findings.

Results

Research Question One: Is there significant difference among pupils with no friend, one friend and more than one friend in their: (a) attitude towards schooling? (b) academic achievement?

Table 1a: Difference among the Pupils with No friend, One Friend and More than One Friend in their Attitude towards Schooling as shown by ANOVA

Friendship Status	N	Mean	Std. D.	Source	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
No Friend	194	30.38	5.08	Between Groups	183.81	4	91.90	3.324	.039	Sig.
One Friend	124	30.33	4.78							
More than one Friend	269	39.42	5.58							
Total	587	29.93	5.27	Total	16274.10	586				

Table 1a reveals that there is a significant difference among pupils with no friend, one friend and more than one friend in their attitude towards schooling ($F_{(2,584)}=3.324$; $p<0.05$). The attitude mean values show that pupils with more than one friend have the highest means score (39.42); followed by pupils with no friend (30.38); and pupils with one friend (30.33). This means that friendship status (no friend, one friend and more than one friend) have significant difference on the pupils' attitude towards schooling.

Table 1b: Difference in Academic Achievement among Pupils with No Friend, One Friend and More than One Friend using ANOVA

Friendship Status	N	Mean	Std. D.	Source	Sum of Square	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
No Friend	194	46.09	26.22	Between Groups	2076.90	2	1038.45	1.829	.161	Not Sig.
One Friend	124	50.99	21.42							
More than one Friend	269	49.34	23.05							
Total	587	48.62	23.86	Total	333598.8	586				

Table 1b above reveals that the difference among the pupils with no friend, one friend and more than one friend is not significant ($F_{(2,584)}=1.829$, $p>0.05$). However, the mean values of the academic achievement among these groups show that pupils with one friend and more than one friend have higher mean (50.99 and 49.34) respectively, while pupils with no friend have lower academic achievement mean (46.09).

Discussion of Findings

Research question one was based on whether or not there would be significant difference among pupils of various friendship status (no friend, one friend and more than one friend) in their attitude towards schooling. The result revealed that there was significant difference among pupils with no friend, one friend and more than one friend in their attitude towards schooling. The result is in agreement with Ladd (1990) who established links between friendship and attitude towards schooling. This may be so because friends feel an increased sense of belonging to the school and feel positively about it because they support one another and this may alleviate the negative effect of stress or dissatisfaction for schooling.

Research question 1b: Is there significant difference among pupils with no friend, one friend and more than one friend in their academic achievement? The finding of the analysis from Table 1b shows that there is no difference in the academic performance of pupils with no friend, one friend and more than one friend. This is contrary to studies like Zitzmann (2005), Wentzel and Caldwell (1997) who reported strong positive relationship between

friendship and academic achievement. However, this result reveals that the mean values of the academic achievement of pupils with one friend and more than one friend are higher than the mean score of pupils with no friend, who have lower academic achievement mean according to table 1b above. The better performance by pupils with one or more friends is consistent with studies like Diehl, Lemerse, Caverly, Ramsay and Roberts (1998) who reported that pupils with one or more friends had higher achievement score than did pupils with no friend. This may be informed by the fact that the quality of the relationship between pupils who are interacting with each other may contribute to cognitive growth and development. Pupils who are friends are more likely to talk openly and challenge each other's thoughts and feelings in the company of friends than non-friends. This interaction might have impacted their achievement.

Conclusion

The findings above have shown clearly that friendship contributed significantly to pupil's attitude towards schooling. This means therefore that friendship status is a very vital pupils' characteristic which should be considered very important as determinant of pupils' attitude towards schooling and academic achievement. Therefore, these variables should be enhanced among the young children in order to promote their social interaction, attitude towards schooling and their eventual academic achievement.

Implications of the Findings

The findings of the study would be helpful to:

- (i) All education stakeholders especially primary school teachers as they would be exposed to the need to encourage pupils in their classroom to interact among themselves to produce better classroom atmosphere in order to create optimum condition for effective learning.
- (ii) Parents, teachers and their wards to jointly select pupils' classmates or friends with desired personality trait that will encourage positive peer interaction, good friendship and educational pursuits.
- (iii) Primary school pupils to develop positive peer relationship that could enhance positive attitude towards schooling and academic achievement.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made: Primary school teachers should have interest of their pupils in their mind by paying close attention to classroom interaction and friendship formation among pupils in order to help them make a good choice of friends among their classmates. Classroom practices and teaching methods that emphasize socialization, friendship and cooperative strategy among pupils should be adopted by teachers that can influence the formation of peer groups that will encourage instructional exchanges like sharing, helping, discussing and giving useful information that may provide positive orientations towards schooling and high academic achievement. Primary school teachers could manipulate the social environment of the classroom where possible by assigning pupils to classes with friends or with familiar liked peer which could provide a support network for the pupils and create a positive incentive for attending school.

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